Rhode Island 2006 EQIP
Application Evaluation Instructions

DESCRIPTION

Through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, (EQIP), the NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to farmers who voluntarily apply conservation practices that treat national, state and local natural resource concerns. Rhode Island ranks and approves applications for funding based on one state-wide process, developed in accordance with national guidance and in conjunction with priorities identified by the State Technical Team and its subcommittees. The ranking criteria are defined in Rhode Island *Application Evaluation Matrix*. Applications are scored by identifying the natural resource concerns to be addressed, and the extent of treatment and environmental benefit to be achieved. In addition, consideration is given to proposals that support: compliance with environmental regulations, agricultural land protection, resource management systems, practice innovation, leveraged funds, conservation system durability, agricultural production, and local priorities determined by the Conservation District.

Documents required for ranking applications include the following:

a) Application Evaluation Cover Sheet, Matrix and *Calculation Sheet*
b) *Rhode Island NRCS FY 2006 Resource Concerns and Quality Criteria* for EQIP, which lists severity scales for each resource concern to be addressed in the Conservation Plan.
c) Supporting documents and worksheets as referenced in the quality criteria document listed in item b) above (i.e. maps of environmentally sensitive areas, tools to evaluate severity, cost estimate detail sheet, etc.)
d) Draft EQIP contract detailing anticipated costs of the practices requested.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE APPLICATION EVALUATION WORKBOOK

General Instructions

1. Enter the applicant's identification information on the front cover of the *Application Evaluation Worksheet*, as well as the total cost data needed in Section IV. Also enter the number of animal units or acres to be addressed or treated with the EQIP Conservation Plan if funding is approved.
2. Identify the extent to which the application meets the ranking criteria, by selecting the appropriate elements from the drop-down boxes in the yellow-shaded cells on the *Application Evaluation Matrix Calculation Sheet*.
    a. Identify the primary resource concerns addressed by the application, severity of the resource concern from the Quality Criteria spreadsheet identified in item b) above, assess benchmark condition and level of treatment based on quality criteria, and define any environmentally sensitive areas affected by the proposal.
    b. Identify any features that enhance the application, including: compliance with environmental regulations, agricultural land protection, resource

management systems, innovation, leveraged funds, conservation system durability, agricultural production, and local priorities determined by the Conservation District

Note: All other functions in the ranking worksheets will populate automatically. Refer to the following sections of this document for more explanation (see "Steps 1, 2, and 3; and Definitions).

Detailed Instructions

Step 1: Application Evaluation Worksheet (*Cover tab*).

Complete the top section, entering specific application identification information, including: *Farm Name, Operator, Address, Town, Zip Code, Phone, Type of Operation, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Farm Number, FSA Tract Number, Watershed Number* (10 digit hydrologic unit code), *the Number of Animal Units (AU) or Acres to be addressed or treated with the Conservation Plan,* and the *Date* when the application was received.

Note: The "*Farm Name*" will become the tag-name of the application, automatically carrying over to all other sheets of the workbook. All other sections of this page are automatically completed as other data is entered throughout the workbook.

Step 2: Enter all cost data for the application in Section IV on the Cover Sheet. This information will be taken from the draft contract developed by the planner and the applicant.

Cost Effectiveness Calculator: No entries are required. This calculation is automatic, once the *Environmental Benefit Calculator* is completed, the *Number of Acres/Animal Units* treated and the *Practices & Costs* table is completed.

Step 3: Application Evaluation Matrix Calculation Sheet *("Calculations" tab).*

Identify the extent to which the application meets the ranking criteria, by selecting the appropriate elements from the drop-down boxes in the yellow-shaded cells on the *Application Evaluation Matrix Calculation Sheet*.

One primary resource concern will be allowed to be scored for each conservation system that is planned. For instance, dairy farms addressing animal waste in a barnyard, as well as nutrient, pest and brush management in the fields, would be granted points under water quality (barnyard issues) and plant productivity (in-field issues). In order to receive points in a given category, there must be a conservation practice or combination of practices included in the contract that will address the primary resource concern identified. Secondary resource concerns associated with the practices are not scored. In the example above, the dairy farm would NOT also receive points under "Animal Quality" since the PRIMARY purpose of improving the barnyard is to improve water quality. However, the brush management practices planned for the fields are primarily addressing plant productivity, but may also improve wildlife habitat. Only plant productivity points would be granted in that example. Supporting documentation must be provided to receive ranking under any resource concern. See the *Rhode Island NRCS FY 2006 Resource Concerns and Quality Criteria for EQIP* for

the assessment tools/process that must be completed to receive points for a given resource concern. Show "N/A" for minor or non-applicable resource concerns.

Risk to environmentally sensitive areas must be assessed and documented.

a) *Environmental Benefit Calculator*: Based on field observations and conservation planning information, select the appropriate choices, from the drop-down boxes in the yellow-shaded cells, that depict the existing and projected resource conditions of the area affected by the proposed contract. This assessment is neutral to size and type of operation. If a resource concern exists and it is treated to meet NRCS Quality Criteria, then points are granted to the application.

   The *Resource Concerns Aspect/Problem* column directly corresponds with the resource concerns identified in the *Application Evaluation Matrix*. The Resource Concerns *Aspect/Problem*, *Benchmark Condition* and *Desired Outcome* are defined according to the *NRCS Quality Criteria*, (using the new national template). See the *Rhode Island NRCS FY 2005 Resource Concerns and Quality Criteria for EQIP* for the appropriate severity rating for the given aspect for each resource concern, and the assessment tools/process that must be completed to receive points for a given resource concern. The extent of environmental gain is measured simply by assessing whether the existing and future condition *Meets, Partially Meets* or *Does Not Meet* the NRCS *Quality Criteria* for the identified resource concern.

   Location Factors are environmentally sensitive areas identified and documented, using approved mapping conventions, including but not limited to the following: RI-GIS Maps, Natural Heritage Program, USGS Quadrangle maps, National Wetlands Inventory, Prime Farmland Soils or Soils of Statewide Importance, known locations of private wells, and TMDL waters listed for phosphorus, fecal coliform, temperature, when agricultural sources exist.

b) *Other National-State-Local Priorities*: Information needed to credit applications that address other identified national, state and local priorities is collected in this section of the calculation sheet. Simply select the appropriate choice from the drop-down boxes in the yellow-shaded cells. All other cells are populated automatically.

The look up table is provided for clarity to visually depict descriptive choices in each drop down menu and associated points.

Printing Instruction.

To print the Application Evaluation Workbook, hold down the <Control> key and select the desired worksheet tabs [*Cover, Cost Estimate Detail* (if appropriate), *Calculations,* and *Evaluation Matrix*], and then select the print command.

Definitions

- Ag Land Protection
  This refers to land that is permanently protected by extinguishing development rights through a conservation easement. Land can be protected by cooperating with either the Rhode Island Agricultural Land Preservation Commission or a local municipality or land trust. Conditionally protected properties are those set aside for a limited time period, such as properties enrolled in GRP or CRP.

- Ag Production
  The 2002 Farm Bill promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. Rhode Island ranking matrix prioritized conservation practices and resource management systems that enhance agricultural production at three levels: a) organic and sustainable agriculture; b) food quality protection or improvement; and c) increases in crop yields or minimizing crop loss. Practices that enhance or protect *food quality* address marketability issues.

- Application Evaluation Matrix:
  Rhode Island Application Evaluation Matrix identifies the 2005 EQIP statewide ranking criteria, and assigns a range of values to various aspects of each criterion. Applications are scored by identifying the existence of priority resource concerns, the severity of those concerns, and assessing the extent of environmental benefit gained through the proposed treatment(s).

- Benchmark Condition
  Environmental gain is calculated by assessing the magnitude of the problem and extent of treatment. This is accomplished by using the NRCS Resource Quality Criteria (national criteria). There are three choices available in the ranking process-- the conditions currently: a) meet quality criteria; b) partially meet quality criteria; or c) don't meet quality criteria.

- Conservation System Durability
  Durability is measured using the life-span of the practice or system being applied, and hence indicates a long or short-term benefit to the environment. Conservation practice life-spans are listed in the EQIP Manual.

- Cost Effectiveness
  A cost effectiveness calculator is required by National policy. In RI, cost effectiveness is calculated by dividing Environmental Benefits by the Cost/Acre or Cost/Animal Unit treated. The quotient is then multiplied by the Applicants total score following adjustments to arrive at the Final Score.

- Desired Outcome
  In assessing the extent of treatment, the desired outcome or objective of the proposed project is set in relation to the existing condition of the resource. Using the NRCS Resource Quality Criteria (national criteria), there are three choices available in the ranking process—the outcome will: a) meet quality criteria; b) partially meet quality criteria; or c) not meet quality criteria

- Environmental Benefit
  Formula: EB=Problem x (Outcome-Benchmark Condition) x Location Factor x 0.15
  EB is calculated by multiplying the points for the identified resource concern(s) by the environmental gain achieved through the planned treatment. The product is multiplied by a factor for location within environmentally sensitive areas. A multiplying factor is added to the formula to help proportion the total points in relation to the other three sections in the ranking system.

- Environmental Benefit Score
  This score is a subtotal of three different aspects: environmental benefit, cost effectiveness and conservation system durability.

- Innovation
  Rhode Island envisions *innovation* as a process that tends to follow a normal curve of social acceptance, as defined by three phases:
  a) *innovative* approaches are ahead of the curve, using cutting-edge technology and methods (practice examples--anaerobic digesters, biodegradable mulch); b) *adaptive* approaches reflect the larger field of practitioners, fitting new ideas and technology to traditional practices to produce improved effects (practice examples—pest management components such as computerization or biological controls, transition to organic production, fuel storage containment); and c) *adoptive* approaches are behind the curve, simply appropriating readily available technology (practice examples—deep tillage, residue management, nutrient management).

- Leveraged Funds
  According to the EQIP Rule, "it is not the intent of the Department to restrict additional cost-shares that a participant may receive from non-USDA sources, but to achieve cost-effectiveness. USDA will reduce EQIP assistance when non-USDA assistance together with USDA assistance for a practice exceeds 100%." In the ranking matrix, additional points are given to applications that bring outside sources of funding and partners into the project. This calculation is made automatically.

- Local Priority
  Each Conservation District, based on their annual work plan, shall determine and document the top three resource concerns in its area, rating them in order of priority. These concerns will receive 5-3-1 points, respectively, in the application ranking score. District Conservationists shall submit their list to the Program Manager prior to ranking applications.

- Location Factor
  Rhode Island has traditionally assessed program applications considering their impact on environmentally sensitive and important resource areas. These traditional "location factors" will be used again in the 2004 EQIP ranking process. If a resource concern exists and the proposed treatment affects a *location factor*, then the appropriate values are applied in the formula for environmental benefit (see definition of environmental benefit score).

  Location factors include the following:

  a) Water Quality:
     - Watersheds of public drinking water, groundwater aquifer/recharge areas, or community wellheads.
     - Prime Shellfish beds potentially impacted by agricultural activities
     - State's list of impaired water bodies – 303d list
     - Priority freshwater fish and critical wildlife habitat – primarily trout streams in the Pawcatuck watershed impacted by water withdrawals. Other areas must be confirmed by NRCS or RIDEM bilologist.
     - Watersheds of Coastal Salt Ponds
     - Other surface water or private wells within 500 feet of planned practice.

  b) Water Quantity:
     - Watersheds of public drinking water, groundwater aquifer/recharge areas, or community wellheads.

- Priority freshwater fish and critical wildlife habitat – primarily trout streams in the Pawcatuck watershed impacted by water withdrawals. Other areas must be confirmed by NRCS or RIDEM biologist.
- Other surface water or private wells within 500 feet of planned practice.

c) Soil Erosion and Soil Quality:
- 50% of Soil is Prime Farmland where practices are to be implemented
- 50% of Soil is of Statewide Importance where practices are to be implemented.
- Does not meet either of the two categories above, but land is permanently protected.

d) Air Quality:
- Outdoor public area contiguous to cropland and existing buffer is inadequate.
- Non-farm residences contiguous to field and buffer is inadequate.

- Points

Each application accumulates points for the aspects of each criterion that it addresses. The points are listed in the far right-hand column of the matrix, subtotaled by section and totaled for a final ranking score.

- Project Enhancements

There are eight additional features that may enhance an application: assistance with regulatory compliance or avoidance, innovative approaches, leveraged funds, planning to different levels of an RMS, ag land protection, ag-production, conservation system durability, and local priority. Refer to the matrix for the criteria by which each of these elements is measured.

- Ranking Criteria

There are 15 basic elements that receive points in Rhode Island ranking system, including: seven (7) *Resource Concerns:* [water quality, water quantity, soil quality, soil erosion, air quality, plant quality and animal quality]; and eight (8) elements of *Project Enhancement,* [regulatory compliance or avoidance, innovation, leveraged funds, resource management systems, ag-land protection, ag-production, conservation system durability and local priority]. Each of these 15 basic criteria, listed vertically on the *y*-axis of the matrix, is further defined by three levels or aspects of the criteria, across the horizontal (x) axis of the matrix. Refer to the *Application Evaluation Matrix* for more detailed listing.

- Regulatory Compliance or Avoidance

Applications that help Rhode Island livestock farms comply with the EPA Animal Feeding Operations (AFO) or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Rule, or other known or pending regulatory action, in cooperation with RIDEM.

- Resource Concerns Score

The resource concern score is a simple summation of the points assigned to the identified concerns of the application. These are assessed on the larger scale of the total project, not practice by practice.

- Resource Management Systems (RMS)

Rhode Island NRCS and the State Technical Committee believe that the desired level of treatment is a Resource Management System (RMS). Points are given to applications that complete a new, revised or existing RMS at various levels, including: a) whole farm, and b) Conservation Management Unit or Field level. Single practices that do not constitute a RMS are not penalized, but simply do not receive these extra points.

- Values

A range of values (9 - 1) are assigned to the varying aspects of the ranking criteria. The highest priority aspect under each resource concern, with a “severe” rating is assigned a value of 9, a moderate severity rating of 7, and a low severity rating of 5. As such, the medium priority aspect under each resource concern is given a point value of 7, 5 and 3, depending on severity. The low priority aspect under each resource concern is given a value of 5, 3, and 1, depending on severity. When national priorities are addressed, the values are doubled in the scoring. Severity levels are evaluated using the appropriate assessment tool, as identified and defined on the *Rhode Island NRCS FY 2006 Resource Concerns and Quality Criteria for EQIP.*